

The Builder.

No. CCCCXIX.

SATURDAY, APRIL 26, 1851.



ON Easter Monday we "took a walk," as people say when they go out without any very precise destination in view, mainly to see the resorts of the people on that day, and the aspect of the streets. At the National Gallery,* although a large number of persons (all orderly and well-behaved) passed through the rooms, the attendance was less than we have seen it on former similar occasions, partly because of the Vernon collection and exhibition by the School of Design at Marlborough-house, which divided the crowd, and partly because the fineness of the morning (too soon changed) sent thousands by steam-boat and by rail to find fresh air and recreation away from town. Around the Exhibition Building in Hyde-park, too, there were fewer persons than might have been expected.

Considerable activity prevails, as a matter of course, in that part of the Kensington-road which adjoins the scene of action. The Hippodrome, which is being built on a plot of land at the corner of the Victoria-road, for Mr. Batty, is making rapid progress. It is an oval, called 500 feet by 400 feet (it looks scarcely so large), and will accommodate 14,000 persons. The seats, of which there are six or seven ranges all round, are roofed over: the enclosed area is open to the sky. The entrance for the horses is at the south end, and over this is the gallery for music. Blue and white are the colours used for decoration: externally, the sides as well as

the roof of the building being slated, the appearance is not very prepossessing. The public entrance is by a composed archway of three openings, formed in the Kensington-road, which has in the frieze some small Roman figures on horse-back, and is otherwise adorned with flying horses. Mr. G. L. Taylor is the architect, and Messrs. Haward and Nixon are the contractors employed.

At Gore-house, where the late Countess of Blessington resided, Mr. Soyer is arranging to dine all the world,—and no one can do it better, if the world will. The Buildings Act had nearly stopped his temporary erections for the purpose, but the difficulty has been obviated. Some ingenuity, it is said, has been shown in the internal decorations. The effect of the exterior, coloured light green and yellow, is not pleasant. A poet sings sweetly—

"Calm and deep peace, on this high world,
And on the dews that drench the furze,
And on the silvery gossamers,
That twinkle into green and gold."

On the front of Gore-house, however, these colours are not so satisfactory: their suggestions are billions.

The painters are everywhere at work: white-lead and zinc-white must be at a premium. All are smartening up, and trying to look clean for as long as London smoke—that costly nuisance—will let them. Some of the shopkeepers say they are decorating to amuse themselves, having literally nothing to do. The number of houses to let is very large, and the demand at present small. The want that will be felt during the Exhibition will be rather for apartments and temporary accommodation than for houses.

In the course of our perambulation we visited the British Museum, and found it literally thronged with visitors: many thousands must have passed through the galleries during the day, gathering knowledge without effort from the silent teachers which line the ways.

The new west wing of the Museum, with its painted ceilings and walls, was, of course, an object of attraction. In our present number we give a view of this gallery, which is built according to the design originally prepared by Sir Robert Smirke: the northern end of it was erected by him about twenty years since: the southern end has just been erected under the superintendence of Mr. Sydney Smirke, under whom, too, the whole of the wing is now being decorated. The general width of the gallery is 41 feet, widening at the centre to 50 feet, and at the south end to 80 feet. The clear height is 31 feet. The length is 282 feet, of which the portion recently built measures 196 feet.*

The whole of this gallery will be occupied by Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities; but the permanent arrangement of the sculpture cannot be made until the side gallery now in course of erection is completed, which will not be the case till next year.

Since our last visit, the walls in part have been painted red, with a black Etruscan border around each space, and look very well.

Westmacott's sculpture for the tympanum of the portico will probably not be completed by the 1st of May, but very soon after. They were hoisting "Mathematics" when we were there,—a sitting figure of seven or eight tons weight. The central statue, standing, is "Astronomy," and is about 12 feet high.

These are all of Portland stone, and are boldy and effectively sculptured.

The enclosure in Great Russell-street, which seems to be of ponderous character (the central piers in particular are immense), will be finished, it is expected, about Midsummer next.

An intelligent looking German asked us, when we were in the Museum, to direct him to the City of London Museum, as he was anxious to see evidences of the early history of the metropolis. It is feared he did not find there all he sought. We would suggest to the Corporation, or to individuals of it, the practicability of getting together, temporarily, a Museum of London Antiquities in some fitting locality for the inspection of our coming visitors. Although the relics are unfortunately scattered, it would not be difficult, we think, with good management, to form a collection of great interest.

We were glad to find that Mr. Bunning had made a commodious entrance to the crypt of Guildhall, so as to enable strangers to view it. We are, therefore, less disposed to think that it is the intention of the Corporation, as stated by some of our contemporaries, not to afford facilities to visitors for seeing such of the few antiquities as the fire of 1666, and the carelessness of later times, have left for London. This crypt was constructed at the commencement of the 15th century, and is a very interesting specimen of its class. It consists of three aisles, four vaults in length, and is in an excellent state of repair.

In the evening of this Easter Monday we happened to be in another apartment in the city,—the Egyptian Hall in the Mansions-house, where the Lord Mayor (Muggeridge) entertained with ability and right good feeling a large party of guests, including, we were glad to see, a sprinkling of literary and scientific men. Nothing was said, however, within our province to note, beyond the announcement that the first of the Lord Mayor's proposed *Conversazioni* will be given soon after the opening of the Great Exhibition.

SOME OF THE IMPEDIMENTS TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF ARCHITECTURE.*

WITH regard to the practical development of excellence by the concentration of direction combined with the division of labour, it appears to me that the civil engineers here in this way given evidence of their superiority in practical wisdom to ourselves; and I conceive that their usage assimilates very closely with that of the Freemasons; and, in short, of the artistic class of every nation that has attained eminence in the fine arts.

An engineer is engaged in a variety of localities, upon very different works; but to each he has a principal assistant, whose business it is to carry out the general ideas of his chief—to mature all his details, with the advantage of consulting his senior's experienced judgment upon difficulties. With young engineers it is an object to get upon the staff of one of the eminent in his profession: both as yielding a reasonable remuneration now, and as offering a pretty certain route, by steadily pursuing which, otherwise unaided talent and industry may eventually attain success. And in this profession, which in some respects nearly assimilates to our own, competitions are almost unknown—so unfrequent as barely to constitute an exception.

I see no adequate reason why a similar routine may not be introduced into architecture—why a man who has a real love for the pursuit, but no connections to help him for-

* See page 267, in our present number.

* See p. 247, ante.

* Touching this building "A Subscriber" writes as follows:—"As it is stated that a commission is to be, or has been, appointed to take into consideration the desirability of erecting a National Gallery, it is to be hoped it will be neither too late deferred, nor the building delayed till not a vestige of the present national collection will be visible to the public from the accumulation of smoke from the numerous furnaces, &c. in the rear, combined with the filth, dust, and dirt that are gradually destroying and obliterating some of the most valuable of the works of art. How strangely are these things managed in the country? When Government have in their possession and power one of the most desirable sites for erecting a commodious and handsome building,—away, in a great measure, from the smoke of the metropolis,—they at once let the opportunity slip out of their hands, and have let the whole of the land formerly forming the Royal Kitchen-garden to speculative builders; and now it is contemplated to encroach on the Royal gardens and palace, which may and will not doubt be required for a portion of the museum family that is daily springing up. But to the point: if this is the site to be selected (although I have heard it hinted the Regent's Park would be a more convenient locality), let it not be done in a higgledy way, by being afraid of encroaching too much on the gardens; let there be a sufficient plot secured to erect such a building, that it may not to end after, as it has with the present National Gallery. What a pity not to have built it sufficiently capacious for the reception of any collection that might hereafter be presented to the country! Let it, Sir, be a building worthy of the occasion and of the country. In erecting such a building, why should not a splendid gallery of sculpture be attached to it of all the great men who have distinguished themselves, removing at once the single statue from St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey, and placing them in such a building where they could be both seen and contemplated to advantage? And here, great point to be considered would be, but the most judicious mode of lighting as well as ventilation,—the latter more especially, as often have I been in the National Gallery where the air has been so bad as to compel myself and others to quit it, and there has been such a film over the paintings that they were scarcely visible. I have not these few hints, in order that you may, with others, be induced to bring the subject before the public, and that the practical experience of practical men may be called into the field as it is too late, and a job made of the whole concern, as has hitherto been the case with our national undertakings. Let no unexpended money be expended, but let the whole be carried into effect at once, making a substantial, handsome, and serviceable building, that will, for once, reflect honour and credit on the country. Might it not be good policy for Government to offer a handsome premium to architects for the best, most practical, and effective building for such a purpose, without giving or placing the building in the hands of any particular architect, whose various exactions would not admit of his studying the subject sufficiently."